Corrected Transcript

Interview with **IVANHOE DONALDSON**
Interviewed by Julius Hobson, Jr.

Ivanhoe Donaldson was the campaign manager of Marion Barry's 1978 mayoral campaign. He began this brief interview before his final illness made it impossible for him to complete it. Ivanhoe died in the spring of 2016.

Date of Interview:

INTERVIEWER: So tell us about the—where would you say the campaign for mayor in 1978 started on behalf of Marion Barry?

IVANHOE DONALDSON: Well, I could be facetious and say the day he was born, the day he got out of Memphis. I don't know. When he started PRIDE Incorporated maybe, but in terms of electoral politics, clearly once he won the school board election. He ran against Ms. Allen.

INTERVIEWER: Anita Allen.

IVANHOE DONALDSON: Anita Allen, who was the epitome of the black middle class, and Marion was dashiki-wearing, shoe shine guy who beat her, and that's when it started. He beat the epitome of the black middle class.

INTERVIEWER: What role did you play, if any, in his campaign in '71 for the school board?

IVANHOE DONALDSON: None.

INTERVIEWER: None?

IVANHOE DONALDSON: I was in Atlanta for elections.

INTERVIEWER: Tell me how you started the campaign for mayor. Did you start with Marion when he won the school board—I'm sorry. Did you start with Marion when he won the City Council in '74?

IVANHOE DONALDSON: Right.

INTERVIEWER: '74, we had the big primary where everybody ran.

IVANHOE DONALDSON: Right, and took office in '75.

INTERVIEWER: Right.

IVANHOE DONALDSON: I was with him in '74 and when he ran again in '76. He got a 2-year term.

INTERVIEWER: Right. When the first Council was elected, the chairman's term of office ran concurrent with the mayor, but the rest of them, the other 12, had to draw straws—

IVANHOE DONALDSON: To see who got the—

INTERVIEWER: —for who got 4 years and who got 2 years.

IVANHOE DONALDSON: Two years, right.

INTERVIEWER: I remember my father got a 4-year straw, and Marion got the 2-year straw.

IVANHOE DONALDSON: Right.

INTERVIEWER: You talked about that a little bit earlier. Tell us what you said to Marion about drawing the straw.

IVANHOE DONALDSON: Well, actually, it was a good thing if you got the short straw because then you can practice in 2 years. It will sharpen our edges, so he agreed. He was very open to that and very good at following guidelines. Marion was a great campaigner. He loved people.

And the other thing is back in the day when we had payphones, Marion never passed a payphone he didn't fall in love with, and he had a great memory. He knew about 5,000 telephone numbers in his head, and he walked around with a bunch of quarters and dimes and put it in there.

INTERVIEWER: You both came out of the civil rights movement as community organizers and activists. What kind of role do you think that played in all of Marion's campaigns?

IVANHOE DONALDSON: Well, I was clearly a community organizer. Marion was an exec. He was an important person. I was in the bushes, and I got a lot of experience with neighborhood organizing and relating to neighborhood people and neighborhood issues and political issues. I mean, there's neighborhood stuff and there's political stuff. They kind of merge in an election, and so it was a good experience for me, 10 years' worth of experience.

INTERVIEWER: Okay. Then that experience helped you immensely again in 1978. You talked earlier with us about how you organized your ward campaigns and your precinct captains. Tell us a little bit about how you did that.

IVANHOE DONALDSON: Well, that's a conversation unto itself. So I can't let you open that door because I'll be here all night.

INTERVIEWER: Okay. We'll save that one for a later part of the interview.